from the present GER of about 10%. Higher Education in general, and technical and professional education, in particular, has been imparting knowledge and skills to meet demands of national development. University Grants Commission has also been supporting the universities and colleges under its career oriented programmes for skill development in various disciplines. While the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) has recommended setting up of 1500 universities nation-wide by 2015, its recommendations are in the public domain for wider national debate.

Indian Education system is one of the largest systems in the world, with its share of educational institutions recognized as Centres of Excellence. In order to strengthen research in basic sciences within the university system, a Task Force was constituted under the Chairmanship of Prof. M.M. Sharma by the Central Government. The recommendations of the Task Force have been accepted by the Government for implementation through the UGC. Subject to finalization of the Eleventh Plan, a substantial expansion of higher education institutions have been proposed along with setting up of new institutions, while-strengthening quality of research and teaching.

Problems in rural electrification

*300. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of POWER be pleased to state:

(a) the status of the present policy of Government to provide electricity to all unelectrified rural households by 2010;

(b) whether in view of nearly 53 per cent of rural households yet to be given power supply, it would be possible to keep up the time-frame already stipulated; and

(c) if not, what are the major constraints in keeping up the execution schedule and how they could be got over to fulfil the task within the deadline?

THE MINISTER OF POWER (SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SHINDE): (a) For the attainment of one of the goals of the National Common Minimum Programme, the Government of India launched an ambitious programme, the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) – a scheme for rural electricity infrastructure and household electrification in April, 2005, which envisages providing access of electricity to all rural households in the country by the year 2009.

The Rural Electrification Corporation (REC), the nodal agency, has so far, received 610 Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) covering electrification of 1.18 lakh un-electrified villages, intensive electrification of 4.01 lakh already electrified villages and release of 453 lakh rural household connections including 259 lakh BPL households. The implementing agencies have reported that electrification works have been carried out in. 62,930 villages including 43,100 un-electrified villages and 19,830 electrified villages up to 24th August, 2007 under RGGVY.

(b) According to the 2001 census, 56.5% rural households were yet to be electrified. As the Government had approved Rs.5000 crore as capital subsidy for implementation of Phase-I of RGGVY during Tenth Plan period, 235 projects were identified for execution in the last two years of the Tenth Plan. The sanction of additional projects, as also the execution of projects in the Eleventh Plan are to be

taken up after the approval for the RGGVY in 11 th Plan period. The scheme aims at the creation of rural electricity infrastructure. The supply of power, in terms of Section 43 of Electricity Act, 2003, is the responsibility of distribution licensee. The Section stipulates that the distribution licensee shall on an application by the owner or occupier of any premises, give supply of electricity to such premises, within one month after receipt of the application requiring such supply. Section 6 of the Electricity Act 2003 stipulates that the concerned State Government and the Central Government shall, jointly endeavour to provide access to electricity to all areas including villages and hamlets through rural electricity infrastructure and electrification of households.

(c) The Ministry of Power and the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) have frequently reviewed the progress of RGGVY and have impressed upon all the stakeholders for expeditious implementation of the same so that the targeted goals are achieved within the stipulated time schedule. The following issues have affected smooth implementation of the programme in the Tenth Plan:

(i) Delay in receipt of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs).

(ii) Delay in forest clearance.

(iii) Delays in land acquisition for 33/11KV sub-stations.

(iv) Limited Humber of good agencies able to execute turnkey jobs.

(v) Very high rates quoted by contracting agencies.

(vi) Shortage of material and increased prices.

(vii) Delays in the issue of road permit and way bills.

(viii) Delays in taking over of physical assets created by Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs) under RGGVY by State utilities.

(ix) Delays in Panchayat certificates for village electrification as per revised definition.

(x) Lack of awareness among villagers for taking new connections.

(xi) Very poor upstream rural electricity infrastructure in some States.

(xii) BPL lists not yet prepared by some states.

(xiii) Refusal to waive state and local taxes on materials by some states.

To accelerate the pace of village electrification under RGGVY in the country, the following steps have been taken:

- Government of India has set up all inter-Ministerial Monitoring Committee which periodically meets to sanction projects and review progress of implementation.

- States have been advised to set up district committees to monitor the progress of rural electrification works. All the states have notified formation of district committees.

- The Government of India as also REC, the nodal agency for RGGVY, are conducting frequent review meetings with all the stakeholders such as, the concerned State Governments; state power utilities and implementing agencies for expeditious implementation of the scheme on the agreed schedules.

- For speedier and effective implementation of projects, their execution has been taken up on turnkey basis.

Melting of glaciers

2139. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA
SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI

Will the Minister of EARTH SCIENCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the first-hand accounts of vanishing glaciers, melting ice routes, crumbling rock formations and flood prone lakes where glaciers once rose, which were recently given by a group of scientifically trained alpine and ice climbers in USA;

(b) if so, whether any such changes have been noticed in the high altitude mountains and lakes in the country;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, whether a selective study of our vulnerable mountains and lakes is proposed to be undertaken, so that timely remedial measures could be evolved?

THE MINISTER OF EARTH SCIENCES (SHRI KAPIL SIBAL): (a) Yes Sir. This is reported as a science and technology column with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) News posted by Associated Press on 7th April, 2007.

(b) and (c) Glaciers, in general, including the Himalayan glaciers, are receding. Geological Survey of India (GSI) has been conducting studies on the recession of the Gangotri glacier since 1935. In the eastern Himalayas, which sit in the Ganga basin, have reported glacier melts.

The rate of shrinking of 30.2 km-long Gangotri Glacier in the last three decades has been found to be more than the rate during the earlier decades. Average recession for this period is about 25 meter/year (83 feet/year). Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG) is studying the melting of Himalayan Glaciers in the Garhwal Himalaya, namely, Dokriani and Chorabari glaciers. The Dokriani and Chorabari glaciers have been receding at an average rate of 17.5 m/year between 1991 and 2005, and 10 m/year between 2003 and 2006 respectively.

(d) Department of Science and Technology (DST) is planning to establish a specialized research center at the national level for initiating holistic studies on Himalayan Glaciology including the effective monitoring all important glaciers and to work out options to effectively deal with the emerging situation with increased snow melts in the future.